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Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General in Beijing meets with Chinese President and Premier on third day of five-day visit.

* UNRWA seriously concerned over negative impact of closures on Palestinian refugees.

* Health conditions inside Iraq deteriorating at alarming rates under sanctions regime according to WHO report.

* Preparatory Committee's session on Establishment of International Criminal Court underway.

* Japan contributes additional $47.4 million to UNDP Programmes.

* UNESCO's Director-General to launch action plans for Rwanda and Burundi.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali met with President Jiang Zemin and Premier Li Peng on the third day of his five-day mission to China. Their discussions covered a wide-range of topics such as the issue of Taiwan, the status of talks on East Timor and the heavy debt burden carried by Africa. The Secretary-General drew attention to the UN Systemwide Initiative on Africa designed to inject $25 billion into that continent over the next decade.

The Secretary-General noted the important role China plays in Africa and said he had rarely visited an African nation where the Chinese had not built roads, schools, hospitals and bridges. President Jiang said China attached great importance to Africa and said that in addition to economic aid, China was encouraging investment to promote economic and industrial development. But he found it worrisome that unlike Asians and Latin Americans, the Africans were seeing a widening of the North-South gap.

The Secretary-General, for his part, noted that Africa was still suffering from the aftermath of the colonial era and the Cold War, both of which had exacerbated the divisions caused by the multiplicity of languages and traditions.

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At the conclusion of a five day fact-finding visit to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) Commissioner-General Peter Hansen, expressed concern over the negative impact of the closures on Palestine refugees. The refugees account for 78 per cent of the population in Gaza, and 38 per cent in the West Bank.

The Agency's operations had been disrupted by restrictions on the movement of staff and supplies, the Commissioner-General said. Schools, health centres and refugee shelters had been at a standstill for three weeks since the current closures were implemented. The proscription on Palestinian labourers from working in Israel meant a stoppage of daily wages while the tight control over the quantity and type of supplies entering Gaza, in particular, impeded business enterprises from operating. In the West Bank, the general decline in economic activity and the loss of jobs in Israel had led to a visible decrease in income and available cash.

The Commissioner-General has appealed to the Israeli authorities for an easing of the closure and permission for Agency staff movement. He has also met with Mr. Yasser Arafat, head of the Palestinian Authority and President of the elected Council, to review the situation.

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Health conditions inside Iraq are deteriorating at an alarming rate under the sanctions regime according to a World Health Organization (WHO) report. The United Nations humanitarian programme for that country lacks sufficient resources to cope with the growing problems, the report notes.

The vast majority of Iraqis continue to survive on a semi-starvation diet due to chronic shortages of both food and cash to buy it. Malnutrition among young children is now widespread; common symptoms include nutritional anaemia, vitamin A deficiency and protein-energy malnutrition. In addition, there are epidemics of malaria, cholera, typhoid and other infectious diseases.

The dramatic rise of mortality rates among infants and children is proof of the impact of such problems, the report states. For example, from 1990 to 1994, mortality in children less than five years of age, increased more than 600 per cent.

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The Preparatory Committee on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court has begun its three-week session. It is charged with preparing a widely acceptable consolidated text of a convention for such a court as a step towards consideration by a conference of plenipotentiaries. The Work of the Preparatory Committee is based on a draft statute prepared by the International Law Commission.

The Preparatory Committee will take into account views expressed in the Ad Hoc Committee on an International Criminal Court --open to all Member States or members of specialized agencies and established by the General Assembly in December 1994 to review the major substantive and administrative issues arising out of the draft statute. The Committee will also take into account views in the General Assembly's Sixth Committee (Legal) as well as

written comments of States.

The Committee has begun its work discussing the 'core crimes' which might be considered by the proposed court: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and aggression. It has also discussed the need to properly define such crimes.

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Japan has contributed an additional $47.4 million to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for its activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Palestinian Territories, Rwanda and Cambodia. Capacity 21, the UNDP environment programme that helps developing countries meet national goals set at the 1992 Earth Summit, will also benefit.

More than $30 million will be provided to Bosnia and Herzegovina's reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. In Rwanda, $5 million will be used to assist with the repatriation and resettlement needs of the refugees and internally displaced. In the Palestinian Territories more than $3 million will be used to promote employment and another $3 million for other UNDP projects. In addition, more than $1 million will be provided for Cambodia's de-mining programmes.

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The Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Federico Mayor, is this week launching action plans for Rwanda and Burundi to help rebuild and develop their educational systems, media and governing institutions.

The two-year plans, including some $1 million funding for each, were developed in consultation with the two countries' authorities and non-governmental organizations, as well as with UN agencies. The plans will build on current UNESCO programmes in Rwanda and Burundi to contribute to reconstruction, reconciliation and development of a culture of peace.

UNESCO's Director-General is expected in Rwanda Wednesday for discussions with government ministers and representatives of UN agencies. The following day, in Burundi, he will confer with members of the government and sign the UNESCO action plan for that country.

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